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Challenges of United Nations' Preventive Diplomacy to Maintain Peace and Security

*Mohammed B.E. Saaida**

Introduction

The maintenance of international peace and security is the ultimate goal of the United Nations. The organization was created to hold peace, not only by preventing and resolving military conflicts among nations, but also by promoting economic, social and development. Preventive diplomacy in the international relations has been a continuing idea at the United Nations for many decades as an important tool to fulfill its goal. The UN Secretary-General, Dag Hammarskjöld, was the first who articulated the idea over half a century ago[1]. Preventive diplomacy has continued to evolve in response to every new local, regional and international problem.

The former United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon states that "Preventive diplomacy is not an option but a necessity". The ever-increasing number of international disputes and costs, demands that the world focuses more attention on preventive diplomacy[2].

Definition of Preventive Diplomacy

Preventive diplomacy term is defined as an "... action to prevent disputes from arising between parties, to prevent existing disputes from escalating into conflicts and to limit the spread of the latter when they occur"[3]. Michael Lund gives anotherdefinition of preventive diplomacy as "Action taken in vulnerable places and times to avoid the threat or use of armed force and

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related forms of coercion by states or groups to settle the political disputes that can arise from the destabilizing effects of economic, social, political and international change"[4].

The Concept of Preventive Diplomacy

The specialty of preventive diplomacy is based on the proverb of "prevention is better than cure". It is much cheaper to prevent conflicts than to payback for post-war reconstructions in several years of peacebuilding[5]. Preventive diplomacy is used to reduce the need for military interventions. This is the reason why the UN describes it as one of the best efficient ways to participate in diplomacy.

The term suggests pro-active, rather than reactive, responses to crises. Preventive diplomacy seems to be firmly preserved in the contemporary global collective security arrangement. The UN Charter states that the goal of the organization is "to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to peace"[6]. Preventive diplomacy is implemented by states, international organizations, NGOs, foundations and other non-state actors. The European Union also started getting engaged in preventive actions through various political initiatives and large funding programs[7]. Large institutions like foreign affairs ministries, international organizations often work to develop active preventive diplomatic strategies that deal with uncertain and risky scenarios.

The United Nations Preventive Diplomacy

Since the founding of the UN in 1945, the prevention of conflicts through the means of the UN Secretary-General's offices has been a core task of its work. In more than seventy years, the UN has a wider range of preventive diplomacy tools at its disposal than ever before. Since 2006, the UN has professionalized these activities through the establishment of the Mediation Support Unit, which, among other things, provides support and advice to envoys in the field and manages a standby team of mediation experts deployable anywhere in the world within, supposed,seventy hours.

In order to keep going with preventive diplomacy, the UN has twelve special envoys for political tasks and mediators and eleven field-based missions, including three regional offices. The mandated tasks, scope and size of political missions can range widely – from a single envoy with a small support team focusing on a specific conflict, such as the Special Envoy to Syria, to large-scale government assistance missions, such as the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, which has a staff of over 1,500. The regional political offices

assist countries to find political solutions to disputes through potential cross-border implications and strengthening their conflict prevention capacities[8]. In addition, multidimensional peacekeeping operations have important conflict prevention functions, with some engaging in mediation processes.

However, the UN Secretariat has stated that a much greater challenge than an early warning is early action. Certainly, countries continue to be reluctant to make use of the UN's mediation services out of fear that internal problems, as part of the UN Security Council's program, will be subject to increased scrutiny. Concerns around sovereignty make it hard for the UN to find early entry points to intrastate disputes at a time when these types of conflicts are becoming progressively more common. Thus, while UN member states have shown an increased interest in dispute prevention, many remain uncertain as to how to provide the essential political space for early engagement.

There are two additional problems in the Security Council that delay quick actions: political disagreement within the Council itself and disagreement over when and how prevention measures should be put into practice. The Security Council plays a key role in both strengthening the UN's conflict prevention measures and in taking quick action to prevent conflict from happening. From Syria to Ukraine to Libya and South Sudan, there are several examples of where the Council has failed to take timely and sufficient action to prevent the outbreak or escalation of a crisis.

Preventive diplomacy is used in both peacetime and conflict time[9]. Each case has its own procedures and measures. The Measures in Peacetime Responses are confidence-building, institution-building, early-warning, and preventive humanitarian action. The Conflict-time Responses are fact-finding, good offices and goodwill missions, crisis-management, and preventive deployment.

Successes and Failures of UN Preventive Diplomacy

Cases of Success

1. *Peacekeeping:* The UN recorded a high success rate in peacekeeping. Since 1948, UN peacekeepers have undertaken sixty-three field missions, which, among many other things, enabled people in dozens of countries to participate in free and fair elections; and helped disarm more than 400,000 rivals in the past decade alone[10].
2. *War Crimes Prosecutions:* On behalf of the international community, the UN has been in charge of running many different tribunals and sentenced the rational sanctions to the war criminals. The

former Rwanda and Yugoslavia leaders have been charged with their responsibilities for war crimes. The Tribunals had developed important cases in international law on human rights and genocide and had provided measures of justice that were taken extremely by the affected regions' people[11].

3. *Ending Famine:* The intervention of the UN's World Food Program, Food and Agriculture Organization and UN-sponsored emergency aid management took actions in ending famines in some parts of the world, particularly in Africa[12].
4. *Running Elections:* The UN has fought continuously for the voting right of people in areas where the ideology of dictatorship or monarchy is still dominating[13].
5. *Reproductive Health and Population Management:* The UN also specializes in mother and child health, family planning and the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). The UN's population fund is highly appreciated and is accredited with help in decreasing infant and maternal mortality in over 100 states[14].

Cases of Failure

1. *Genocide and Massacre:* The UN appointed "Assistance Mission" in Rwanda in 1994, which had full acknowledgment about the coming up genocide, but the peacekeepers failed to stop the Hutu's actions on a fatal riot and murder almost a million people of the Tutsi. The United Nations peacekeepers failed to stop the disaster in South Sudan region when their mission is to shelter civilians by any means. Their track records, however, show that they were not always been able or ready to do that[15]. Also, there were massacres of more than 8,000 Bosnian Muslim people at the hands of Serbian forces in Srebrenica and Kosovo in 1995[16].
2. *Rape and Child Sex Abuse in the Congo:* In early 2005, the peacekeepers in the Democratic Republic of Congowere accused of paying women and young girls for sex abuse. They were supposed to be protecting from sex and sometimes raping them. Other subsequent reports found there had been similar cases and allegations in countries ranging from Bosnia to Cambodia to Haiti.
3. *Spreading Cholera in Haiti:* The world's worst recent outbreak of cholera had been showed by genome testing, cholera swept through Haiti after the 2010 earthquake. The UN claimed immunity from a subsequent lawsuit despite more than 700,000 infected and 8,000 dead.

4. *Iraq Oil for Food Program:* The program was made to bring relief by selling Iraqi oil through the UN which put international sanctions on Iraq. The UN was supposed to supervise the delivery of medicine and food with the resulting fund. Huge amounts of money were directed to private accounts. Some UN officials were involved. It was regarded the worst ever financial scandal in the history of UN.
5. *Nuclear Proliferation:* In 1945, when UN was created, the United States of America was the only country in the world who owned and tested the nuclear weapon. In the 1970s, the nuclear non-proliferation treaty was signed by most of the world's states, including five nations that admitted to owning nuclear weapons: the US, England, China, Russia, and France[17].

Challenges to Preventive Diplomacy Application

Despite the appreciation of preventive diplomacy as an essential tool in conflict management, the United Nations has continuous obstacles, particularly in its conflict prevention activities. The requests of preventive diplomacy have therefore continued to face many challenges. Some of these challenges include a diversity of actors ranging from governmental to non-state actors who are engaged in preventive diplomacy initiatives[18]. The discussion that follows will highlight the various challenges in the implementation of preventive diplomacy approaches.

Financial Challenges

The late UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon noted that there are real restrictions on raising sufficient resources. The chronic lack of funding by the UN hinders its functioning in the long term and in the instant response to crises. Early intervention is very important to the accomplishment of preventive diplomacy and sometimes due to insufficient funding, the United Nations is forced to go into areas where war has already broken out to try and normalize the situation and try to bring about a de-escalation of the conflict[19]. Therefore, this means that even though early warnings may have indicated signs of an imminent dispute, conflicts happening elsewhere may divert the attention of the UN and hence a cycle of conflicts continue around the World.

Challenge to Limitations to Interventions

It is important to point out that the United Nations does not have peacekeeping forces; it exclusively relies on member states to provide the

peacekeeping forces. Demands from member countries to mobilize peacekeeping forces takes time and often times there are challenges with logistical preparations as well as equipment required for the operation especially in cases where the conflict has already exploded. This, therefore, poses a challenge resulting in delays and effectiveness in the peacekeeping operation. A postponement in responding to conflict means more lives lost, destruction of property as well as general disturbance to economic, political as well as social activities within the society.

The Challenge to Lack of Capacity

The process of preventive diplomacy entails rigorous mediation as well as utilization of other pacific settlement of disputes resolution mechanisms. The United Nations Department of Political Affairs in their multi-year appeal report acknowledges that in addition to understaffing in the department, there is a lack of capacity and experience to carry out mediation and other preventive diplomacy approaches and this greatly affects interventions in dispute and conflict prevention[20].

The Challenge to Lack of Coordination

Since preventive diplomacy has opened an opportunity for numerous stakeholders to engage in dispute and conflict prevention, there has also arisen a challenge in coordinating the efforts of all these stakeholders leading to duplication of effort and even creation of confusion amongst the disputing parties as the parties involved in helping the disputing parties come to an agreement have different objects and capacities and this has a bearing on the success of the process and at times leads to preventive action fatigue[21].

The Challenge to Veto Power

The United Nations Security Council consists of fifteen nations, five of which are permanent: France, Russia, China, the United States, and the United Kingdom. The other ten council members to be elected just for two-year terms. The five permanent members enjoy the luxury of veto power; when a permanent member vetoes a vote, the Council resolution cannot be adopted, regardless of international support. A single veto of the five permanent members can beat and abort any decisions supported by the other 14 majority members who vote yes.

Conclusion

Preventive diplomacy, which was developed during the Cold War as a way of moderating superpower competition, employs the approaches such as mediation, negotiation, conciliation, adjudicative dispute resolution, good offices just to bring to end situations that threaten international peace and security. Taking an early diplomatic action aimed at preventing new disputes and the escalation of existing tensions into violence, as well as limiting the spread of ongoing conflicts diplomatically. The UN managed to accomplish successes in operations and tasks, especially in the post-cold war era. At the same time, it failed to accomplish some of its tasks around the world.

There are great opportunities presented to the United Nations and the international community in applying preventive diplomacy, numerous challenges need to be addressed. These include providing of a sufficient budget for the United Nations for preventive action, building the capacity and experience of staff at the department of political affairs of the United Nations and the mediators to be able to competently apply preventive diplomacy approaches. There is also need for concerted efforts in coordinating the activities of all the players involved in preventive diplomacy in order to eliminate the threat of preventive action fatigue and duplication of efforts. It is also important that the international community builds a strong early warning system where authentic intelligence is gathered on the situations that threaten global harmony and security and also taking action whenever intelligence is provided in order to prevent hat the problem with UN finance is not about the money, but certainly about politics. The biggest obstacle to strengthen UN finance and strengthening the UN, in general, is the will of the superpower governments. The UN member should pay their dues fully on time since there is a gap between people's expectations about what the UN should accomplish and the funds allocated for the organization's activities.

Regarding the protection of civilians, there is a need to address the gaps in many missions between resources and mandates. The peacekeepers should maketheir best when the civilians are under real threat made by probable aggressions.

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